



Agenda

The Maryland Council for New Americans

Maryland & District of Columbia Credit Union Association

8975 Guilford Road, Suite 190

Columbia, Maryland 21046

July 9, 2009 10:00am – 12:00pm

1. Opening Remarks and Welcome

Secretary Tom Perez and County Executive Isiah Leggett gave welcoming remarks. The following Council Members were present: Eric Seleznow, Caroline Varney-Alvarado (on behalf of Secretary Skinner), Renee Samuels, Barbara Gradet, Gustavo Torres, Pastor Ghandi Olaoye, Dr. Michael Lin, Barbara Gradet, Commissioner David Gray, Young Chan-Han, Olive Ahkigbe, Pastor Claudia Ballard, Adam Ortiz, Angela Lagdameo

2. Discussion of Report Recommendations

Secretary Perez gave a preface regarding the rich history of immigration to Maryland and the importance of that frame for the Introduction of the report.

Commissioner Gray said that financial literacy is something everyone needs which led to a discussion of financial literacy. Barbara Gradet said that there is a big initiative in schools for financial literacy. Michael Lin stated that when an American institution, such as GM, files for bankruptcy, it creates a new America. So, everyone that is impacted becomes a "new American." He stressed that the report ultimately benefits a wider population.

Olive Akhigbe, designee for Couper, said that there is a new economic order where we share common issues despite your country of origin. Pastor Kemi Onanuga gave the church perspective of what people are going through: the church is representative of the people in society. She gave the anecdote that Jesus House and other churches and ministries are providing financial literacy courses. Paul Vann from the Paul Vann Foundation for Financial Literacy said that financial literacy training needs to be brought to the corporate world, universities, etc.

Adam Ortiz stated that the Council has been given the basic content, but there is still content missing. Content that will be spotlighted when the report is finished includes best practices, historical information, and demographics.

Adam Ortiz and Angela Lagdameo then went through each major focus (Workforce, Citizenship, Financial Services, and Governmental Access) and summarized what each section was about. They read each of the recommendations aloud and explained the rationale for each.

Executive Director Eric Seleznow commended the great job that was done in capturing the central issues. He highlighted the navigator and resource centers for new Americans. He also emphasized the training and ESL section. Executive Director Seleznow had an opportunity to go to Seattle to see a program that taught and trained vocational skills.

Michael Lin also thanked all the writers for their work and said that the report is “ready for primetime.” However, there still needs to be some fine tuning and wanted three major components stressed: Governmental structure, the community component, and the educational component. He recommended that the Council explore how educational institutions can be more encouraged and would suggest more explicitly that community colleges in the state jump in.

Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett said that the project needs to have the support of the government and that is why the Council is pushing for a cabinet-level position. He pointed out that the report should ask for a welcome center, not something less than that.

Pastor Olaoye asked how the languages for vital documents will be chosen for translation. County Executive Leggett said that translation for 4-5 major languages is key because if there are more than those, it may become counterproductive. Instead of trying to translate into every single language, people should be directed as necessary for resources they need and can use. Pastor Olaoye said that French should be one of the main languages since many African countries speak French. Secretary Tom Perez said it would also be important to capture up-to-date data since languages of preference will evolve as populations evolve. Adam Ortiz pointed out that particular areas should also be considered. For example, where there are large concentrations of Cameroonians, perhaps local government should consider have document translated in French. He also mentioned the language link line, a toll-free number that contains 30 languages.

Gustavo Torres brought up 4 different issues.

- 1) New immigrants who are undocumented. Many of them are not going to qualify for the recommendations that were made. One recommendation that should be made is for the government to push for comprehensive immigration reform. The Council has an opportunity to encourage local and state government to reform immigration. Recently, Los Angeles passed comprehensive immigration reform.
- 2) The Council should mention youth new Americans. They are not mentioned in the report. The youth have tremendous challenges (example: gangs). The Council should emphasize services and programs for youth.
- 3) Clarify the fiscal note for the recommendations. This would allow the Council to advocate for recommendations to become reality.
- 4) The Council needs to have a clear body that will monitor the process. The Council should be the monitor group to check development and status of recommendations.

County Executive Leggett said that, on Torres' 1st recommendation, we should not try to describe what the immigration reform should be. Secretary Perez was uncertain about monitoring the progress of recommendations.

Olive Akhigbe said that when it comes to the youth, from a financial services perspective, it would be different from what the Council has been doing for the adults; the tactics and education would be different. Secretary Perez suggested that there can be a section on youth that would focus on the need to provide options so that youth are not gravitating towards gangs. County Executive Leggett noted that Montgomery County has a Positive Youth Initiative and that this can be mentioned in a small paragraph or two.

Secretary Skinner's designee, Caroline Varney-Alvarado, said that an expansion of the history of the Council would bring the report into a context. What is missing is somehow addressing what is going on in the current economic crisis.

Pastor Claudia Ballard said that the report can suggest youth outreaches, such as the Boys & Girls Clubs and faith communities to pull youth in.

Pastor Kemi Onanuga said that what the Council needs to look at more deeply is developing programs that would engage youth and get them out of trouble. Also, the Council should look at stable homeownership opportunities for new Americans and models that provide rent and mortgage assistance.

County Executive Leggett advised that one of the mistakes that the Council could make would be to get too detailed. It would get into debates about

different programs and would distract from the main objectives of housing and job opportunities.

Barbara Gradet noted that the report does not mention the needs of senior citizens, who are often left out of the mainstream. She would hate to see the Council leave out the Department of Aging and the resources that are available. Secretary Perez suggested that a section about senior citizens and youth can be listed under “Vulnerable Populations.” County Executive Leggett pointed out that the Governor is trying to empower families and this may be a nice frame.

Michael Lin wanted clarification between recommendations #17 and #19. He suggested that the wording of both recommendations should clarify whether the cabinet-level position was the same as the office for New Americans. Also, he asked that rather than mention that immigrants have affected the U.S. economy for many years, it should say that immigrants have affected the economy since the founding of the country (second sentence of introduction).

Secretary Perez said that in terms of the flow of the document, there needs to be something between the Introduction and the Workforce section, some sort of bridge that highlights the most relevant data, frames the economic crisis and challenges that cut across our entire community, precisely how to hone the purpose of this, lay the groundwork for everything else, how the Council’s focus relates to the needs of Maryland and building a strong workforce. It would be different from the Executive Summary. It would answer “Why are we here?” and why the Council chose the four areas of focus (workforce, citizenship, financial services, and governmental access). The report should recommend what philanthropy and businesses can do. The Council needs to identify programs that can hasten the pace of learning English and evidence-based approaches to quicker learning.

Barbara Gradet was impressed with the Marriott model that was presented to the Council. It is in the interest of corporations to teach job skills and language at the same time.

Secretary Perez said that fiscal notes are an art, not a science, and they take on a life of their own. It would be better to suggest a range because the Council would be accountable for the number it gives. If the Council cannot come up with a good number, it would be better to leave it out because it would not be productive.

Secretary Perez asked if there was enough in the report for county officials to take back to their county commissions. County Executive Leggett said that Montgomery County wants someone in contact with the Governor’s office.

Commissioner Gray said that utilizing libraries as centers with minimal increments of investment, then using that as a measure of success. No two counties are going to have the same enthusiasm. Secretary Perez said that it would be useful to have a toolbox of measures that counties ought to consider. Commissioner Gray pointed out that lists would be read more than a whole report. County Executive Leggett said that the Council should encourage cities and counties to develop their own New Americans councils. Secretary Perez agreed and said that there is no one-size-fits-all.

3. Report Guidelines, Timeline, Logistics

Adam Ortiz

Angela Lagdameo

County Executive Leggett asked what the next step should be to finalize the report itself. The Council needs to work out the broader details and consider people's final comments. The Council will still try to meet the August 3rd deadline. Secretary Perez said that finalizing the report will involve more than editing. For example, the fiscal notes and coming to a consensus on a range.

Olive Akhigbe said that the Financial Services committee is comfortable and will want to meet by teleconference. However, the challenge would be to come up with a fiscal note. Commissioner Gray said that once you put a price on it, people will start to question how the Council will spend the money. County Executive Leggett said that the fiscal note he sees would be to establish the organization and staffing and it will not be until the Council has a final recommendation that it should said it will cost A, B, and C. Secretary Perez said that the report should include fiscal implications that government, philanthropy, and the private sector ought to do.

Adam Ortiz said the final feedback should be in by Monday. Secretary Perez said that there is time set on July 28th if it is needed.

4. Announcements, Public Remarks, Closing

Conference coming up on September 22nd in Annapolis about social integration of immigrants. It is a conference for service providers.